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the Axiochus as evidence of Eleusinian things. M. Foucart has failed to detect the signs in it of Orphic influence, chiefly because he fails to understand the possible import of that momentous phrase in it: *ὄντι γεννήτη τῶν θεῶν* (c. 13), which he renders inaccurately by "toi qui es un des fidèles des déesses" (p. 365). He refuses to allow to Orphism any influence at Eleusis, and rightly; yet in curious contradiction to this view, he uses Orphic texts—such as the gold-leaf inscriptions of Magna Graecia and Crete (p. 430)—and references to Orphic mysteries in early and late writers as direct evidence for the Eleusinian. But in spite of defective equipment and erroneous method, parts of the book, for instance, the paragraphs on the sacred families and functionaries, where he establishes some points of interest (chaps. vi, vii), are of value for the student. And we are indebted to M. Foucart for insisting that we should study the Eleusinian mysteries on the plane, not of primitive magic, but of higher religion.

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### CONCERNING THE NATURE OF GNOSTICISM

In his *Introduction à l'étude du Gnosticisme* (Paris, 1903) M. de Faye instituted an inquiry, on entirely new lines, into the origin and value of the patristic accounts of Gnosticism. Many readers of the book must have wished, like the present reviewer, that he would follow up his preparatory studies, and develop their bearing on the larger problems. This he has at last done in the work before us,<sup>1</sup> which is easily the most important contribution to the subject since Bousset's *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis*. Bousset maintains, it will be remembered, that the primitive Gnosticism must be sought in the anonymous systems—that its roots are traceable to Persian Dualism—that it was mainly pre-Christian, and never had more than a formal and accidental connection with Christianity. These views have been adopted, with various modifications, in most of the literature that has grown up in recent years around the mystery-religions. M. de Faye, however, arrives at different conclusions. Setting out from the position that the testimony of the controversialists is secondary in value to that of the gnostic writers themselves, he examines the surviving fragments of those writers, and shows that their interest was moral and religious rather than speculative. Ethical ideas

<sup>1</sup> *Gnostiques et Gnosticisme. Étude critique des documents du Gnosticisme chrétien aux II<sup>e</sup> et III<sup>e</sup> siècles.* By Eugène de Faye. Paris: Leroux, 1913. 476 pages.

have the first place in the teaching of Basilides. The mythology of Valentinus, when we get back to its original form, was consciously symbolical like that of Plato, and was merely the framework of a theory of redemption. Marcion's Gnosticism was essentially Christian and ethical, and moves within the sphere of purely biblical conceptions. These great masters in the middle of the second century were the earliest Gnostics, and the systems described in the *Philosophoumena* represent a later Gnosticism which arose out of their teaching by a process of crumbling down and recombination. In the Coptic writings which illustrate the latest phase of Gnosticism the dependence on Valentinus is plainly apparent; and even for this degenerate Gnosticism the practical religious interest is still central.

M. de Faye thus holds that a "primitive Gnosticism" is a chimera. About 130 A.D. appeared the true creators of Gnosticism, and they exhibit several distinct types of gnostic thought. They belonged to a common movement in so far as they all give prominence to the ideas of redemption, reunion with God, *gnosis* as the means of this reunion. But these ideas were not confined to one particular school. They were shared, to some extent, by all cultivated men of the time, and the founders of Gnosticism were simply Christian thinkers who sought to interpret Christianity in the light of the prevailing ideas. Their teaching won popularity because it appealed to intellectual men who were sincere Christians, but could not rest satisfied with an unreasoned dogmatism such as we find in the Apologists. Toward the end of the second century, however, Gnosticism underwent a transformation. The creative impulse died down, and new systems could form themselves only by the mutual infiltration of the older ones. At the same time, under the influence of the ritual and sacramental ideas now in vogue, the conception of *gnosis* as the means of redemption gave place to that of mystery. In the second century the sects have still the character of philosophical schools; in the third they have become fraternities of mystagogues.

Any adequate criticism of M. de Faye's thesis would involve a detailed analysis which would here be out of place. But there are several considerations of a more general nature which seem to throw doubt on its validity. In the first place, although the method of judging the gnostic thinkers by their own extant fragments is theoretically a sound one, it is likely in practice to prove fallacious. The fragments are so meager that the attempt to build conclusions on them can hardly result in anything but guesswork. One admires the skill with which M. de

Faye reconstructs the genuine teaching of Valentinus and Basilides from a few detached sentences, but the fabric is somewhat precarious at the best. Again, the mere fact that the anonymous systems are only known to us from writers of the third century is no proof of their late origin. It may well be that they represent the more ancient types of gnostic thought, surviving in obscure sects, and reasserting themselves in the decay of the larger movement. Their affinities with one or another of the oriental mythologies (as pointed out by Bousset and Reitzenstein) are too radical to be explained away as later borrowings. Once more, it may fairly be objected that so far as M. de Faye has proved his thesis he has only succeeded by defining Gnosticism in a restricted and arbitrary sense. He himself admits that the Gnostics, in their attempt to interpret Christianity, made use of ideas which they derived from alien sources; but does not this admission vitally affect the whole question? We have to deal with a form of Christianity which grew up in an age of syncretism, and which cannot be understood until we determine the nature and origin of the borrowed elements. By unduly narrowing the scope of his problem M. de Faye has evaded instead of solving many of its chief difficulties.

At the same time he has undoubtedly made some of the phases of the movement clearer and more intelligible than they have hitherto been. More than any previous investigator he has done justice to the religious motive that underlay the chaotic speculations of Gnosticism. He has thrown out suggestions of the utmost value for tracing its historical development, although his contention that it only arose about the year 130 can hardly be maintained. He has made us aware of the essentially Christian character of much of the gnostic thinking, and has helped us to understand how Gnosticism could be recognized for so long as a legitimate type of Christianity. Whatever judgment we may form of his main conclusions, we cannot but acknowledge that in many directions he has marked out possible paths in what has hitherto appeared a wilderness. His work is the more valuable as we are now coming to realize that Gnosticism was no mere aberration, interesting only to specialists in the darker regions of early church history, but is bound up with some of the central problems in the development of Christian thought.

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